Conservation

DHR f. 2:

NOW OR NEVER

By Frank Barton

Small lake in proposed Wright Reservoir Recreation Area.

In the Spring of 1970, every voter in Duxbury should ask himself—"Do I want to live in a solid mass of house lots and at the same time pay twice as much in taxes as I am paying today?"

We face two very real threats. First, because so little land has been reserved for public use, most of the remaining unbuilt areas of the town are wide open to development. Driving through Duxbury, you may see beautiful woods on either side of Route 14 or along the Expressway, but it would be a mistake to believe that those woods will be there next year. Stop your car and walk through the trees. In many places, you will find surveyor's stakes marking new lots. At present, high interest rates are a powerful brake on new house construction. Once that brake is relaxed, we will have our own population explosion.

It is interesting to compare Duxbury with Concord. Both have a real place in American history. In both towns, something important from the American past has been preserved, something that can never be recaptured if it should be destroyed. Concord has reserved about 25% of its land for public use. The Town of Duxbury has set aside for conservation and open space, 109 acres, less than one per cent of its total area.

Checking by phone with heads of Conservation Commissions in nearby South Shore towns, I found a number of towns that have done as little as Duxbury, but I did not find one that has done less.

Woodlands can disappear, water courses can be flanked on each side by new houses, cranberry bogs can be filled and become developments. Unless we take action, there is just nothing to stop these possibilities from becoming realities.

The second threat to Duxbury is financial. Everyone has recognized for a long time that new housing developments would mean new schools. It is evident now that we are going to have this problem in a very big way. A recent study by the Conservation Commission shows that among newcomers to Duxbury there are many young couples. These young people have pre-school children at home. Many have not completed their families.

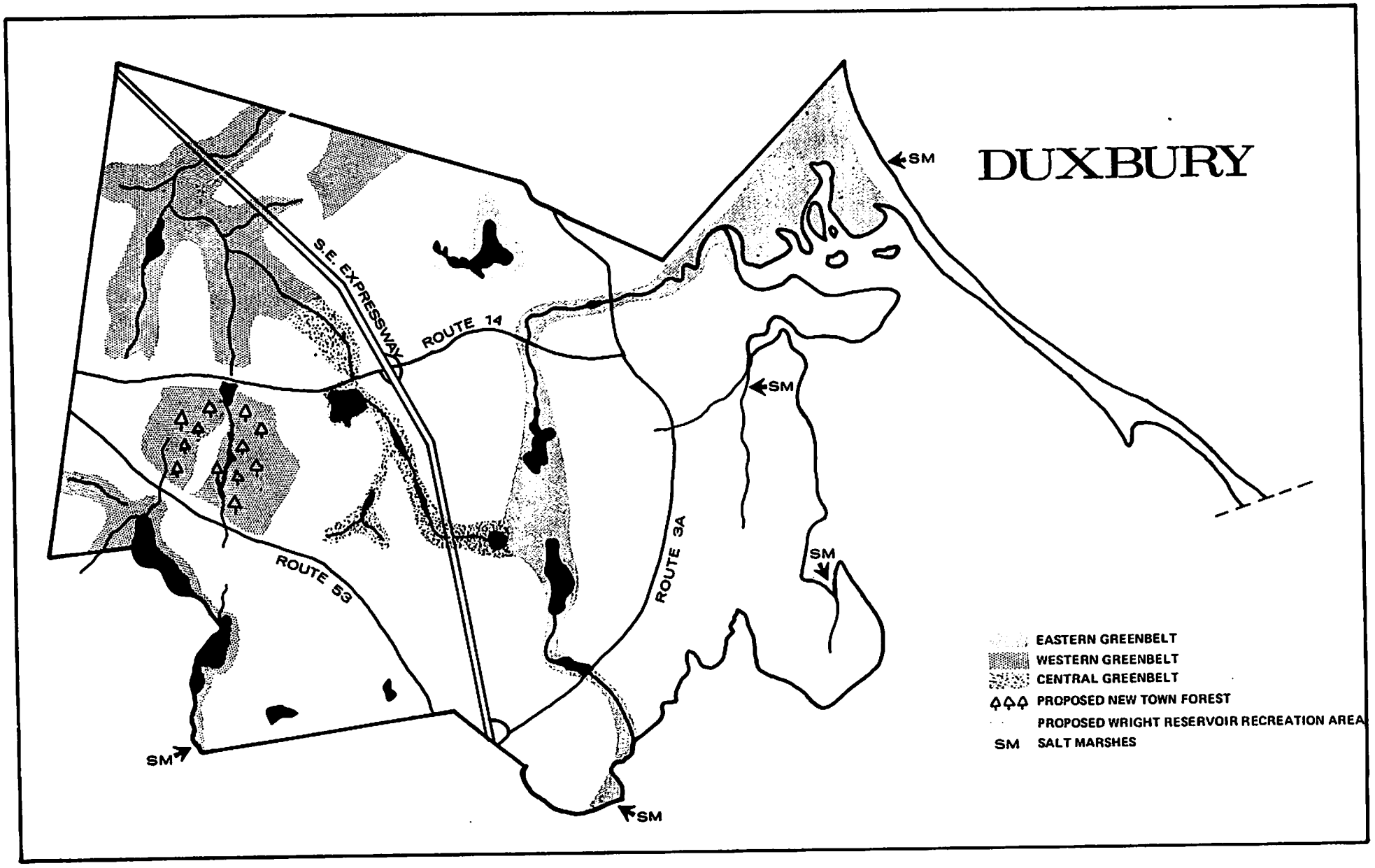
Exhibit I shows a Duxbury Conservation Commission study of houses completed in the Town during the years 1966-1968. The trend toward younger children is shown in the age distribution of children. The percentages of young children increase each year.

An attorney, interested in the work of the Commission, made a study of a single assessors block of new houses, Exhibit II. For the most part, these figures are self-explanatory. The presence of many pre-school children is again made evident. School children from this one block will increase in five years by 59%.

Exhibit II demonstrates that a typical block of new houses costs the Town money from the outset. In the first year, the Town pays $7,725 more for education than it receives back in taxes. The education deficit increases every year until it reaches $84,677 for 1974. And this is only one block of houses.

Perhaps the most distressing thing about our situation is that both unpleasant potentialities, the over-crowded town and the high tax rate, will become the facts of life if we do not take action.

The Duxbury Comprehensive Plan was published in 1969 and is available at the Town Offices. Recommendations concerning open space are contained on pages 31-65. These recommendations are divided into two categories: 1) Conserva-


DUXBURY
S.E. EXPRESSWAY
ROUTE 14
ROUTE 53
ROUTE 3A
SM
SM
SM
SM
SM
EASTERN GREENBELT
WESTERN GREENBELT
CENTRAL GREENBELT
PROPOSED NEW TOWN FOREST
PROPOSED WRIGHT RESERVOIR RECREATION AREA
SM SALT MARSHES

tion, 2) Recreation. Under Conservation the Plan includes the establishment of green belts, the preservation of salt marshes, cranberry bogs and reservoirs. Under Recreation, the Plan calls for new ball parks, tennis courts, skating and hockey areas and boat facilities.

The map on page 2 illustrates the main conservation objectives in the Town Plan. Please don't take the boundaries seriously to a millimeter. The map is only meant to show the general area.

Specifically, greenbelts have been planned along watercourses. It was felt strongly that part of the charm of Duxbury derives from our wild streams and their wooded banks. The Eastern Greenbelt runs from the Great Marsh to Island Creek. According to the Plan, the Western Greenbelt will stretch from the South River and Witton Woods to Chandler's Pond. A Central Greenbelt connects the two main greenbelt areas. Included in the Westem Greenbelt is a new town forest. This is one of the most beautiful wild areas in Plymouth County.

Greenbelts serve another very practical purpose, they keep houses from areas where drainage problems are likely to arise. It has been the experience of other towns near Boston that backed-up cesspools and flooded cellars can be expensive not only to individual owners, but also to town treasuries. Because houses were built too near streams, whole areas in some townships have been contaminated with sewage. In situations of this sort, people look to the Town Fathers for remedies.

The Wright Reservoir area represents a hope. Pine woods and tranquil waters are magnificent. We took a picture on a Conservation Walk. If funds are available, and if the owner agrees, the Town might some day acquire this natural recreation area.

Almost all our shoreline is fringed with spartina grass. Here and there, the grass widens into salt marshes. With the exception of a few acres, the Conservation Commission is not, at the present time, asking for money to purchase salt marsh areas. There is a good chance that the State Department of Natural Resources will protect our marshes with us. Your Commission is actively promoting this desirable outcome.

How does a Conservation Commission go about converting a plan on paper into physical reality? As a volunteer, I have been watching the members of the Commission at work and I can assure you that they have been working very hard at it. They have catalogued all the parcels of land in the proposed conservation areas. They have asked for the cooperation of 400 owners. They have attended numerous small local meetings. They have talked with many individual owners.

At a meeting in Boston in November, Chairman Bennett outlined the Conservation Plan to members of the State Department of Natural Resources and to the representative of the Federal Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. Commissioner of Natural Resources, Brownell, complimented Chairman Bennett and the other members of the Commission on the thoroughness of their preparation.

A second natural question might be—what legal instruments can a Conservation Commission employ when working toward the realization of the Town Plan? The Commission cannot spend Town funds without specific authorization. How then, does a Commission move forward with a plan involving hundreds of pieces of real estate?

The Commission has sought willing sellers. With these, it has contracted purchase and sale agreements. On some land, it has taken options. These agreements and options become void, if the Town Meeting does not endorse them. At this year's Town Meeting, the Commission will present a package of such agreements.

The conservation restriction or easement can be a very important tool in preserving the character of landscape. Unfortunately, a misunderstanding has arisen around the word "easement." To many it signifies "right of way." Electric Light Companies, for instance, seek easements across private property for the construction and maintenance of power lines. In this case, a right of way is part of the easement. But an easement is not necessarily a right of way. There are a great many different kinds of easements.

Selectman Paul Barber explained that the town frequently makes use of easements in handling the problem of surface drainage along highways. Property owners give the Town easements for the construction of dry wells. They do not give up any other rights.

I am told on good legal authority that the term "conservation restriction" is coming into general use in Massachusetts. This term has the great merit of making plain what sort of easement is involved. For instance, along the Blue Fish River and in the Duckhill and Island Creek areas, the Commission is seeking conservation restrictions. In these beautiful and natural areas of Duxbury, owners agree not to fill land within a certain distance of streams and not to erect structures out of keeping with the landscape.

The conservation restriction is a tool which may be used to maintain the attractiveness of an area without taking anybody's land. You give up something comparatively small but gain something greater. Your neighbors, having made similar agreements, will not be spoiling your view. Your property is protected against a general degradation of real values. And again, you do not give anyone a right of way over your property.

In its total plan, the Conservation Commission calculates that 755 acres of upland and 680 acres of wetland would ideally complete the project. These acquisitions would total $2,059,500. This year the Commission article will concern itself with purchases of approximately 500 acres, costing about $700,000. The town must vote to purchase these lands and to borrow the money necessary to acquire them. It is anticipated that between 1/2 and 3/4 of this money will be reimbursed to the Town from Federal and State programs. The President has said that we are entering the decade of the environment. By acting now we can move ahead of other South Shore towns. We can gain a place on the President's environmental bandwagon while there is still room for us. Incidentally, Duxbury when it has sought aid, has never failed to be reimbursed by State and Federal authorities.

It is cheaper to borrow money and conserve land than to allow it to be developed. In my investigations, I did not find anyone who seriously doubted this proposition. Exhibit II shows what only one block of new houses can do to town finances. If each one of the 755 buildable acres, which the Commission is seeking to acquire, were to become a house lot, at least 1100 new children could enter the Duxbury School System. Our present school population is about 2000.

Some developers tend to oppose conservation on general principles. This is short-sighted. Stable real estate values depend, among other things, on a balance

between developed land and open space. The Commission is only attempting to give the town the balance it should have.

We can save on the tax rate and acquire greatly needed open space. At the same time, we can preserve some of the beauty of Duxbury. The alternative is to pay higher taxes and have a second rate, uninspiring community. How can there be any doubt about which is the wise course to pursue?

Path in the proposed New Town Forest.

EXHIBIT I

As of November 1969 — Population of pre and school age children attributable to dwellings taxed on January 1, 1969 and built under housing permits issued in the years;

	1966	1967	1968	Summary
No. permits issued	69	73	143	285
Dwellings taxed in 1969	59	59	78	196
No. residents contacted	53	48	71	172
No. not contacted	6	11	7	24
Total children to age 18 in contacted homes	97	78	93	268
Estimated for all dwellings	106	94	101	301
Average children per family	1.8	1.6	1.3	1.5
Age 0 — 4	24 (25%)	25 (32%)	42 (45%)	91
Age 5 — 10	35 (36%)	39 (50%)	38 (40%)	112
Age 11 — 18	38 (39%)	14 (18%)	13 (15%)	65
No. school age in 1969	73	53	51	177

Summary; New homes over the past 3 years, while showing a decline in the average number of children, show a significant trend toward much younger children in the newest dwellings, namely children who will need 9 to 13 years of education.

Specifically taking one block which has shown accelerated development over the past two years, the cost to the Town in terms of Schooling Cost Deficit can be calculated as follows;

EXHIBIT II

Profile Of Development and School Deficit Cost In One Block
1967-1968

(A) Revenue

Number of houses built under permits issued in 1967-68 and taxed as complete dwellings January 1, 1969 69
Average Real Estate Tax $769.00
Average Automobile Excise Tax paid by owners of these 69 houses in 1969 . . . . . 53.00
Total average tax revenue $822.00
Total tax return on 69 houses (not including the small increase in utility personal prop.) $822 x 69 . . . . . $56,718.00

(B) Education Costs (1969)

57 of the 69 houseowners were contacted and the following data obtained;
Total number of children to age 18 121
Average number children per house 2.12
Ages; 0 — 4 56 (46% of the total)
Ages; 5 — 10 54 (45% ")
Ages; 11 — 18 11 (9% ")

Assuming 2.12 children under age 18 in the 69 homes, the total number of children then becomes 146 with an age mix of

0 — 4	(46%)	67 children
5 — 10	(45%)	66 "
11 — 18	(9%)	13 "
		146 "

Costs of educating the children in the 5 to 18 age group (66 plus 13 or 79 children) at the 1969 cost per pupil of $817.00 . . . . . 79 x $817.00 . . . . . $64,543.00
Revenue predicted from Schedule A $56,718.00
1969 Deficit for Education (-) $ 7,725.00

(C) Town Costs

Schools represented 56.6% of the 1969 Town Warrant lists of Duxbury Municipal Costs.

(D) Projected Costs

5 year projection to 1974 for this sample, all pre-school children in 1969 are in school in 1974, and children over 12 in 1969 are graduated. In the 69 families;
1974 Total school age children 133
Assume a 10% increase per year in costs per pupil from the $817 in 1969 brings the 1974 cost per pupil to $1315/pupil
133 pupils at $1315/pupil . . . . Education costs will reach $175,895
(Note. No capital costs are included)

(E) Projected Revenue

Assume a 10% annual increase in the total tax bill per home beginning with the $822/home in 1969 will produce an average tax in 1974 of . . . . $1322.
69 homes x $1322/home Total 1974 Revenue of $ 91,218

1974 Projected Education Cost	175,895
1974 Projected Revenue	91,218
Education DEFICIT IN 5 years	$ 84,677

IN 5 YEARS THE SCHOOL DEFICIT IN THIS ONE BLOCK WILL INCREASE BY A FACTOR OF 10 . . . . . .

THIS IS WHAT IT COSTS THE TOWN WHEN OPEN SPACE IS USED UP.

It is not an unreasonable calculation to say that each lot in this block cost the Town $111 this past year for education alone. Should this deficit increase by a factor of 10 in 1974 it is simple logic that land left open tends to save rather than cost the Town money.

Rather than ask the cost of conserving land, ask instead what it will cost if you don't conserve it.